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Book Review

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Yörükler

By Aleksey Kalyonski, PhD

Prosveta, 2011

472 pages

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PhD Aleksey Kalyonski's research is dedicated to a periodically discussed, but still insufficiently studied topic – the Yorouks on the Balkans. The Yorouks belong to an irreversibly disappeared social and cultural phenomenon, but with long, in given periods – bright and contradictory presence for the “outside world”. They are an exciting case of “subject” and “regulated” nomads, who settled in the Balkans alongside the ottoman invasion. Their historical path is perhaps the best documented of all the similar groups ever to settle in Southeast Europe.

Using different models and methods of historical demography and anthropology, PhD Kalyonski reconstructs this group's historic path, from its dawn over the straits practically until the current day.

One focus of the research is viewing the discussion problem of the proportion between the socio-categorical and cultural profile of the Yorouks on the Balkans.

A special place is reserved for the ottoman and other notions, stereotypes and clichés for the cultural diversity. Based on the geographical, political, social, cultural and other specifics the author justifies the conclusion that the Yorouks in Southeast Europe gradually separate as a distinct community of Turkic-speaking nomadic and semi-nomadic and afterwards sedentary local groups. According to PhD Kalyonski one of the most important factors for the formation of the Yorouk tradition on the peninsula is the Ottoman military, administrative and socio-categorical system itself.

The inborn hostility of the sedentary societies towards the migrating pastoralists is widely known. The author though, has managed to defeat it, because he has kept a safe distance from the



radical and deliberate thesis circulating in the scientific field. Furthermore a substantial role in this research is played by the constructive and well justified critics of a sequence of persistent historiographical thesis and models of rationalization of key problems of the ottoman period, like perhaps the problem of the Yorouk component of the ottoman colonization and the role of the Yorouks in the assimilation of the non-Islamic population. This is achieved by attracting numerous and various sources and the application of a modern theoretical approach. Thus, fully displaying various general and specific lines of tradition change both within the ottoman system and among its nomadic subjects and the surrounding nations.

PhD Kalyonski attempts to reveal “the hidden” beneath the surface of the official ottoman terminology Yorouk social structures of the XV-XVII centuries. In his eyesight falls even the unexplored late period of the Balkan Yorouks – the end of XVII to the first decades of the XX century, as well as the separate research of a local case – in a part of today’s Southwest Bulgaria.

“The Yorouks” is a book of high scientific value. Its text is consulted with every leading expert in this scientific field and the results are in unison with the patterns in the world and regional studies. Moreover, it is a testament for the Bulgarian humanities sciences, because obviously Bulgarian ottoman studies in the face of PhD Kalyonski have evolved to a more mature state.